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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the strategies used by the Research Department chief of the Cleveland (Ohio) Public Schools to restructure a department beset with staff cuts, district reorganization, and a demoralized staff. The reform movement for accountability is challenging school district research departments to provide timely, meaningful, objective information in the most efficient way possible. The following strategies were employed: (1) departmental functions were not division-based, but left as a set of tasks to be completed by the department; (2) no one specific staff member was asigned to a function, but rather staff teams were assigned to a function; (3) projects were grouped on the basis of comparability of a particular criterion; (4) assessment of projects was conducted in the context of the district operation; (5) access to computer technology was facilitated, allowing more creativity; and (6) Department visibility was prioritized. A list of four references, two charts, and four tables of statistical data are appended. (FMW)

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Cleveland City School District

RESTRUCTURING A RESEARCH DEPARTMENT AS A FUNCTION OF NEW ROLES/NEW NEEDS

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RESTRUCTURING A RESEARCH DEPARTMENT AS A FUNCTION OF NEW ROLES/NEW NEEDS

The demands for objective evidence about the condition of American education has thrust public school researchers into public scrutiny. In the wake of recent educational reform movement which is almost synonymous with accountability -- that responsibility especially in large city school districts has fallen on the district research departments. And while these responsibilities have gotten heavier and more demanding, research departments have also shrunk in size -- victims of district reorganizations and sometimes of the politics of the times.

This presentation will describe the strategies of a Research Department Chief in an urban school district to restructure a department beset with staff cuts, district reorganization, and a demoralized staff.

The reorganization of the Cleveland schools in May 1982 as a consequence of the 1978 Remedial Order resulted in the expansion of responsibilities for the district's Department of Research and Analysis, as well as an increase of staff from 34 to 52. Its responsibilities, traditionally limited to testing, evaluation and proposal development before 1978, was expanded to include policy planning and analysis, desegregation monitoring, research dissemination, and other aspects of educational research. And the former one-division was reorganized to a department with four divisions, namely Desegregation Monitoring and Special Services, Testing and Evaluation Division, Policy, Planning and Analysis, and Research Dissemination and Proposal Development. Each division was headed by a Director who reported to a Chief (refer to Chart I in the Appendices).

Some of its major responsibilities included:

- Implementation of the Cleveland Testing Program.
- Provision of consultation and development services to departments, divisions and individuals requesting assistance in identifying funding areas.
- Compilation of demographic data, surveys and designs/needs assessments.
- Evaluation of program, student performance in the district through the operation of the Cleveland Testing Program and evaluations of local and externally funded program in the district.
- Review and coordination of approval of outside requests for cooperative research endeavors.
- Responsibility for information-gathering, analysis and reporting related to the implementation of the desegregation plan including assessment of progress towards compliance.
- Coordination of policy and regulation development.

Each division mandated to have distinct responsibilities, was headed by a Director, with 12 to 15 staff per Division. For the period 1982 through 1987, the district's Research Department operated as a tightly-structured four-divisional unit. Was that an effective way to organize the department? some may say yes, some may say no. The verdict has not come in.

But the majority agreed. The nature of the tight structure of the four divisions contributed to the ineffectiveness of the Department. Divisional lines were not crossed — a function of the uneasy times or the personality of the people at the top — resulting in divisional lack of coordination, sometimes duplication of activities and data collection.

Change in the department practices did not come by a mandate or by a policy — change came because of events happening in the district beyond control. A superintendent committed suicide...another resigned before his time...a new man became Cleveland's superintendent. And reflective of the

political times, a change in superintendency also called for a change in the Research and Analysis Chief.

By 1987, when I became Chief, the functions of the Department have not only increased, but the Department was confronted with a 38% reduction in research staff. There were morale problems, and our visibility in the school is almost nil. The Department was still expected to conduct its many functions with limited staff. Obviously we cannot continue to operate as if there were 52 staff in the department.

The Departmental organization (Chart I) mandated by the Court to meet the needs of 1982, then non-workable, was really unworkable in 1987. The first strategy is to loosen up the tight divisional structures, drastically change the organizational structure of the department as noted in Chart II (refer to Chart II in the Appendices).

Chart II presents pictorially the organizational structure which represented a marked contrast to the 1982 organization.

- Departmental functions were not division-based...they were left as the set of tasks to be completed by the Department.
- No one specific staff was assigned to a function; rather staff are assigned to a function.

This approach runs counter to most of the research reorganizations, where specialization of skills characterized organizational units, e.g. Testing Unit, Grants Office, Evaluation. The restructuring of Cleveland's Research and Analysis Department has some advantages:

- Expands the skills of staff thereby increases the departmental resources.
- Provides opportunities for teamwork.
- Minimizes divisional competitiveness.

The preponderance of evaluation assignments of the Department called for a review of the traditional one project - one staff assignment, which appears to be the regular practice in most districts. Instead of the one person-one project assignment, a drain on the Department's limited resource — the strategy calls for assignment of a team to a group of projects. The project coordinator assigned to the project, is not always the senior staff. Every staff is given an opportunity to manage the project evaluation efforts — an approach with the added advantages of building up staff leadership, and addressing the equity issues.

Projects were grouped on the basis of comparability of some criterion, e.g. objectives, funding source. For example, projects designed to serve at-risk students, were evaluated as a group of projects and compared on the same variables including but not limited to attendance, suspension rates, per pupil costs, pupil stability, project retention rate, scores, etc. Instead of asking a simplistic question, as to whether this one project attained its objectives or not, a broader question is asked to read as follows:

- Given these projects designed to _____, which project is the most cost-effective.

A sample of this approach is in the Appendices.

Assessment of projects was conducted in the context of the district operation. Does it really matter if the project's objectives were achieved without having any effect on District operation? Evaluation of Chapter I projects for example, went beyond the State and Federal requirements of pre-post gains. The impact of Chapter I's sixteen million dollars on the district indicators of achievement, such as non-promote rate, attendance, graduation, student stability, dropout rate and suspension rate was a very important question to be addressed (refer to sample in the Appendices).

Our access to computer technology enabled us to be more creative with data. As part of our responsibility to provide data for accountability purposes, the department has published annually the School Building Profile which serves as a a unique management tool for key school administrators including school principals. The Building Profile provides a two-year data on test scores, attendance, suspension, dropout rate, failure rate, enrollment, and other variables which allows assessment of the District Five-Year Goals and Objectives at the district, cluster and school level (see sample in the Appendices).

And finally, we should strategize to strengthen our sense of district-orientation. To survive as a department, we must work towards becoming an integral part of the education mainstream. We must make an effort to be visible in the district as often as we can. We should be out there in the schools whenever we find the time — and not only to talk about testing, report evaluation findings, or write school regulations. It is just as critical to work on our own public relations by being more accessible, more responsive to requests for technical assistance, (inservice, proposal development, etc.) providing more support and doing a lot of educating as to what the different audiences can expect of the Department of Research and Analysis.

CONCLUSION

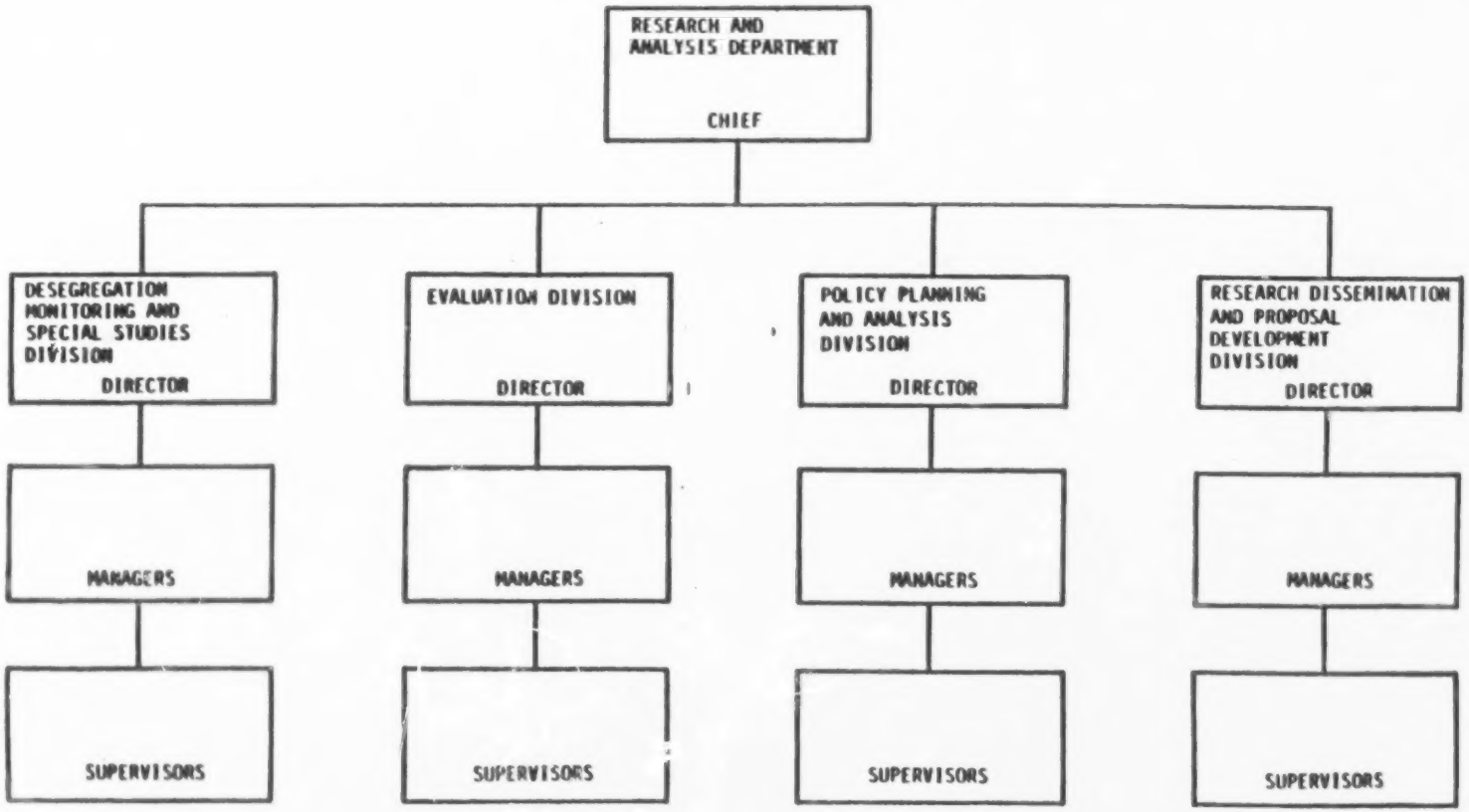
If research departments are to survive, we can not afford to function as we had in the past. We need to redefine our roles relative to emerging new needs and new demands. The educational reform movement for accountability is challenging us to provide timely meaningful objective information in the most efficient way possible. We should strengthen our visibility out in the field — working toward becoming at least one of the dynamic core of the

district operations, we need to demonstrate to our peers, that our services are indispensable to their day-to-day operations, and that we have something to offer that nobody can. Unless we are able to do all of these, our survival as educational researchers in the schools is at stake.

APPENDIX

CHART 1

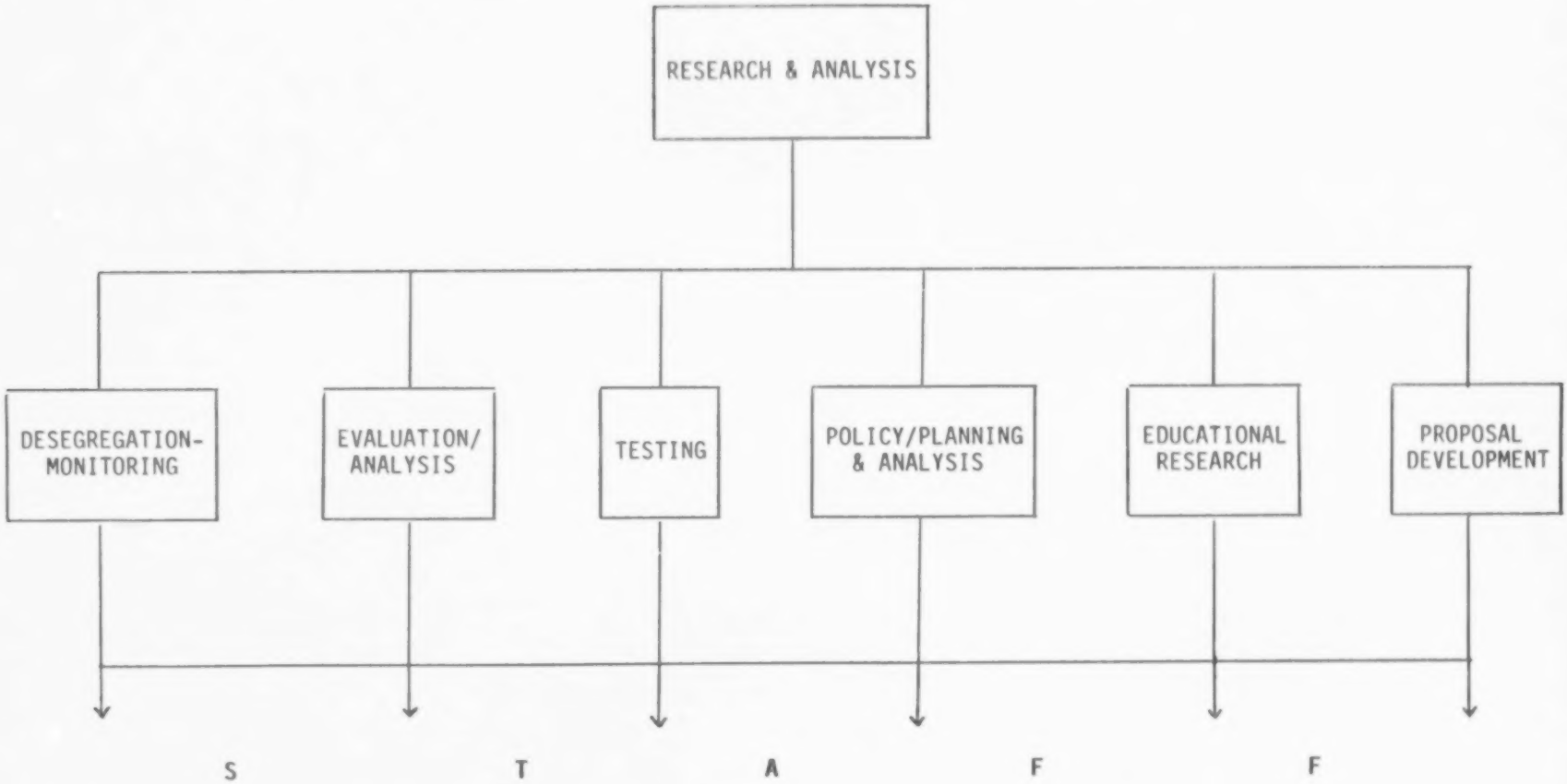
CLEVELAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



9A

9B

CHART II



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Cleveland City Schools, 1987

Table 5

Comparison of Chapter 1 to District Mean Attendance Rates in Grades 1-6

	Mean Attendance Rates				
Grade	All Pupils	(N)	Chapter 1	(N)	Difference
Total	90.3%	41,768	91.6%	10,267	1.3%
K	85.6%	5,992	90.%	157	4.9%
1	89.0%	6,957	90.5%	1,777	1.5%
2	90.3%	6,295	91.5%	1,005	1.2%
3	92.2%	6,056	92.5%	1,240	0.3%
4	91.9%	5,808	91.9%	2,253	0.0%
5	91.8%	5,420	91.8%	1,973	0.0%
6	91.7%	5,240	91.6%	1,862	-0.1%

Grade Level Promotion.

Results of a study of Chapter 1 pupils promoted to the next grade level at the end of the year of program intervention showed that 93.8% of public school participants in Grades K-6 advanced. By comparison, the promotion rate of all District pupils (including the Chapter 1 participants) in the same grades was 95.7%. Consideration of these statistics, together with the recollection that Chapter 1 served pupils who were most educationally disadvantaged*, leads to an inference of the high level of the program's effectiveness in Cleveland schools.

Table 6, page 19, shows a comparison of the promotion rates of Chapter 1 and District pupils in Grades K-6 who were enrolled at the end of the 1988-1989 School Year. Only at Grade 1 did the promotion rate of Chapter 1 pupils exceed the promotion rate of all pupils in the District, by a difference of 0.4%. On the average, the promotion rate of Chapter 1 pupils was only 1.9% lower than the rate of all pupils in the District at those grades. Except at Grade 1, the

*Participants were selected for service on the basis of a standardized test score at or below the 36th percentile rank, national norm. Pupils most deserving service were served first.

Table 6

1988-1989 Chapter 1 vs. District Promotion Rates: Grades K-6*

	District			Chapter 1			
Grade	Enrollment	Promotions	Rate	Enrollment	Promotions	Rate	Difference
Total	42,070	40,243	95.7%	9,793	9,184	93.8%	-1.9%
K	6,151	6,072	98.7%	149	134	89.9%	-8.8%
1	7,040	6,181	87.8%	1,690	1,491	88.2%	0.4%
2	6,328	5,983	94.5%	955	846	88.6%	-6.0%
3	6,080	5,911	97.2%	1,189	1,102	92.7%	-4.5%
4	5,844	5,672	97.1%	2,144	2,044	95.3%	-1.7%
5	5,404	5,258	97.3%	1,877	1,798	95.8%	-1.5%
6	5,223	5,166	98.9%	1,789	1,769	98.9%	0.0%

*Year end data

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF PROJECTS

	Alt Expl	Alt Suspn	Entrepre-neurial	Natural Helper	Project Success	Upward Reach	YRC
NUMBER SCHOOLS							
Elementary							
Intermediate	13	17		2			10
Senior High	9	3	12		12	12	2
Magnet	1						
FUNDING							
Source							
Chapter 1							
DPPF	X	X				X	
Gen Fund	X				X		X
Other			X	X			X
AMOUNT							
Total Amount	$147,485	$1,020,929	$115,396	$64,627	$3,733,880	$382,615	$143,218
Per Pupil Cost	$3,010	$376	$2,263	$788	$2,892	$534	$182
STAFFING							
Proj Dir	FT	PT	FT	FT		FT	
Teachers	FT	FT	FT		FT		
Aides/Tutors		FT	FT			FT	PT
Advocates/Comm Vol			FT	PT			PT
Clerical	FT	PT	FT			FT	
Other	F&PT		FT				PT
SERVICES SELECTED							
Tutoring		X	X		X	X	X
Support Classes	X		X	X	X		
Counseling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Work Opps			X		X		
Mentoring			X		X		
Job Training					X	X	
Soc Ser	X	X	X		X	X	X
Other				X	X	X	X
PUPIL SELECTION							
Overage		X	X		X		X
Suspension		X	X	X	X		X
Absenteeism		X	X	X	X	X	X
Grades		X		X	X		X
Prenancy					X		
Drug Abuse					X		X
Other	X		X	X	X	X	X
PARENT COMM INVOLVEMENT							
Mentor			X		X		
Speakers		X	X	X	X		X
Parent Mtgs	X	X	X		X		X
Volunteer In Schls			X	X	X		
Tutoring			X		X		X
Monitoring							X
Other					X		X

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OUTCOME SUMMARY

	ALT EXPL		ALT SUSPN		ENTREPRE-NEURIAL		NATURAL HELPER		PROJECT SUCCESS		UPWARD REACH		YRC		TOTAL
# STUDENTS	49		2717		51		82		1291		717		785		5692
INTERMD	26	53%	2281	84%	0	0%	82	100%	0	0%	0	0%	66	8%	2455
SR HIGH	23	47%	434	16%	51	100%	0	0%	1291	100%	717	100%	719	92%	3235
MALE	35	71%	1741	64%	33	65%	31	38%	722	56%	514	72%	439	56%	3515
FEMALE	14	29%	976	36%	17	33%	51	62%	569	44%	203	28%	346	44%	2176
BLACK	39	80%	1977	73%	47	92%	42	51%	927	72%	549	77%	543	69%	4124
OTHER	10	20%	740	27%	3	6%	40	49%	364	28%	168	23%	242	31%	1567
RIDER	23	47%	1467	54%	22	43%	38	46%	426	33%	250	35%	344	44%	2570
WALKER	26	53%	1240	46%	27	53%	44	54%	848	66%	459	64%	437	56%	3081
FREE/RED LNH	49	100%	2689	99%	51	100%	80	98%	1291	100%	716	100%	776	99%	5652
LAU	0	0%	52	2%	1	2%	0	0%	23	2%	2	0%	2	0%	80
SPEC ED	5	10%	370	14%	0	0%	5	6%	28	2%	110	15%	80	10%	598
DROPOUT	0	0%	41	2%	3	6%	0	0%	66	5%	81	11%	4	1%	195
PROMOTE	34	69%	1959	72%	18	35%	71	87%	703	54%	258	36%	184	23%	3227
WITHDR	4	8%	207	8%	6	12%	3	4%	145	11%	157	22%	47	6%	569
TRANSFER 0	42	86%	2260	83%	41	80%	74	90%	1067	83%	542	76%	670	85%	4696
TRANSFER 1	5	10%	352	13%	3	6%	6	7%	137	11%	111	15%	93	12%	707
TRANSFER 2+	2	4%	105	4%	7	14%	2	2%	87	7%	64	9%	22	3%	289
DAYS SUS 89	14.98		4		3.35		3.52		4.3		5.17		4.92		4.42
DAYS SUS 88	8.9		4.25		9.53		1.82		5.67		7.54		4.64		5.09
TIMES SUS 89	2.55		0.96		0.98		0.84		1.23		1.36		1.11		1.10
TIMES SUS 88	2.61		1.28		2.76		0.54		1.72		1.97		1.92		1.57
% ATTEND 89	NA		78.70%		61.00%		84.70%		NA		57.30%		73.50%		74.14%
% ATTEND 88	79.90%		84.70%		67.30%		86.30%		70.00%		65.20%		81.60%		78.31%
AVG RDG 89	NA		42.08		NA		46.41		38.41		40.6		40.91		41.15
AVG RDG 88	39.76		43.47		30.7		49.89		37.9		39.68		41.65		41.72
# SCORES 89	5	10%	1806	66%	2	4%	70	85%	665	52%	188	26%	509	65%	3245
# SCORES 88	30	61%	2006	74%	34	67%	75	91%	808	63%	271	38%	601	77%	3825

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